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ECONOMIC GROWTH

(Energy and Environment)

RP marks Earth Day

By ELLALYN B. DE VERA

(Source: Manila Bulletin News Online – 4/23/08)

Secretary Jose "Lito" L. Atienza Jr. of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) led the country in celebrating World Earth Day yesterday and urged Filipinos to manage the country's remaining natural resources to avert a food crisis and stave off economic problems.

The DENR chief said it is equally important to ensure the equitable distribution of the country's natural wealth to benefit all Filipinos, especially the poor and other marginalized sectors of society.

"One of the shortest ways to achieve genuine progress is to properly manage our bountiful riches with the full participation and involvement of our people," Atienza said.

"We have bountiful resources but why are we still experiencing difficult times? This is because we have mismanaged our resources and not because of our big population as claimed by some groups," he said.

As part of the DENR's efforts to maximize the participation and involvement of the people in environmental protection, seven barangays nationwide were conferred the Model Barangays for Ecowaste Management during the period 2006-2007.

Atienza said the search is a way of enforcing Republic Act (RA) 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, by giving recognition, reward, and support to barangays as a mean to encourage segregation, composting, and recycling solid wastes.

"It is an important event to recognize the barangays' effort to successfully implement efficient waste management in their respective localities, as well as to encourage all other barangays nationwide to practice proper solid waste management," Atienza said.

The United States Embassy yesterday reminded Filipinos to work together in protecting the environment, particularly to avert the dwindling state of the country's water resources.

US Embassy Charge d' Affaires Paul Jones said during the Earth Day celebration at the SM Mall of Asia in Pasay City that the state of water resources is most often taken for granted as people assume that water is abundant.

"The Earth Day's theme highlights a natural resource that seems so abundant but sometimes overlooked," Jones said. This year's Philippine Earth Day theme is "Tubig ay Buhay: Ating Pagyamanin at Linisin (Water is Life: Let us Enrich and Clean Up)."

"Water is both important for the health of the environment and human life but the current state of the Earth's water resource shows how we easily forget just how essential water is for food, energy, transportation, and even our identity and culture," Jones said.

"We join here today overlooking the planet's biggest water resource, which is the ocean. Today reminds us of water's increasing role and importance to our lives," he added.

Senate President and Nacionalista Party President Manuel B. Villar Jr. yesterday urged shopping mall owners to contribute to the international effort of cleaning up the Earth and help reduce the daily garbage produced by millions of their customers.

"As we celebrate Earth Day today, we should think about the gains of the effort to save the planet and to introduce means to advance the cause of reversing climate change," Villar said.

Villar asked owners of department stores, malls, and commercial establishments to make available reusable environment-friendly shopping bags to their customers and patrons to replace the usual plastic shopping bags.

"Today, there are grocery stores that are providing their customers with earth-friendly reusable bags but for a fee. This move will be more effective if they will give out these bags at no cost to customers," Villar said.

Sen. Loren B. Legarda said that yesterday's Earth Day celebration was extra special for her because Luntiang Pilipinas, the environmental group she founded to plant trees nationwide, will mark its 10th anniversary this year.

"If Luntian was just a tree-sapling 10 years ago, then how strong and sturdy a tree it has grown since I and a handful of volunteers decided to start an environmental revolution for the sake of future generations," said Loren.

"This organization of dedicated men and women has already planted two million trees since its founding on Oct. 28, 1998. On to another 10 years of planting oxygen-producing and pollution-absorbing trees," added Loren.

She stressed that for Luntian members, whose number has grown exponentially through the years, "every day is Earth Day, as it should be for all people if mankind is to survive."